Strengthening virus research programme

1638. SHRIMATI SHOBHANA BHARTIA:
SHRI VIJAY J. DARDA:

Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether the Planning Commission has suggested to set up a national level mechanism to provide direction for search in various ailments particularly of concern within the country;

(b) if so, whether Government are planning to strengthen the virus research programme for diseases like hepatitis C and E, Japanese encephalitis, dengue, avian flu, and enteric viruses;

(c) whether Government have asked the recognized institutions in the country to submit the proposals; and

(d) if so, by when a final decision is likely to be taken?

THE MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SHRI KAPIL SIBAL): (a) and (b) No, Sir. The Planning Commission has not suggested setting up of a national level mechanism to provide direction for research in various ailments, particularly, of concern within the country. However, during the Eleventh Plan period, the Department of Biotechnology has proposed to strengthen virus research in the country with emphasis on viral diseases like Hepatitis 'C' and 'E', Avian Influenza, Japanese Encephalitis, Dengue and other emerging viruses like Chikungunya. The goal of this programme is to establish Virus Research Centres and R & D Networks in order to develop broad comprehensive biomedical research programmes for viral diseases in India.

(c) and (d) The Department has invited proposals through advertisements in the national dailies. The proposals are evaluated and selected programmes shall be implemented during the Eleventh Plan period.

Quality of scientific research institutions

1639. SHRIMATI N.P. DURGA: Will the Minister of SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that India ranked at the 17th position for the quality of scientific research institutions and universities in the world;

(b) if so, the efforts Government are making to take our institutions and universities within the top ten positions;

(c) whether the Science and Technology Policy, which was released in 2003, has helped to improve India's status; and

(d) the incentives or encouragement Government are providing to young scientists to generate interest in them, to conduct more and more research and submit more and more papers?

THE MINISTER OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (SHRI KAPIL SIBAL): (a) and (b) One of the recent reports has positioned India at 6th among other countries in the world in quality of scientific research institutions and universities. The Government of India, on its part, has taken a number of steps to rejuvenate and promote scientific research in universities and other scientific institutes of excellence. The Plan Allocation of scientific departments has been doubled from about Rs. 12000 crores in the Eleventh Plan to about Rs. 25000 crores in the Tenth Plan and it is planned to increase it approximately four fold in the Eleventh Plan. The Research Infrastructure programme of DST is a targeted programme to upgrade the laboratory infrastructure in universities and other higher educational institutions. Several institutions, centres of excellence and facilities in emerging and frontline areas have also been established; for example, in the areas of Brain Research. Marine Biotechnology, Stem Cell and Tissue Engineering, Soft Computing, Water Resources Development, Nanophosphors, Display Technology; Fuel Cell Technology, Ultrafast Processes, Protein Research, etc. More recently; three new Indian Institutes of Science Education and Research (IISERs) have been set up at Kolkata, Pune and Chandigarh which, apart from carrying out frontline and internationally competitive research, would offer M.Sc. programmes in a multi-disciplinary and academically flexible and research-oriented environment. It is also planned to establish autonomous research institutes in the areas of molecular materials, glaciology, cancer research, etc.

(c) Science and Technology Policy 2003 (STP 2003) has recognized the national needs in the era of globalization and changing context of the scientific enterprise. The policy and programmes of Eleventh Plan of the S & T Departments, aimed to improve India's status in international scenario have been designed taking into account the broad principles laid down in STP 2003.

(d) Developing and nurturing of human resource in Science and Technology has always been on top of the Government's agenda. A number of schemes have been initiated to attract research scholars namely Young Scientists/Women Scientists Fellowships; Swarnajayanthi Fellowships, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee Fellowships, KS Krishnan Fellowships and J.C. Bose and Ramanujam Fellowships for practicing scientists, Junior/Senior Research Fellowships (JRF/SRF), Research Associateship etc. More recently the fellowships of JRF/SRF have been enhanced. The Government, in the Eleventh Plan is also proposing to launch a new scheme called INSPIRE (Innovation in Science Pursuit for Inspired Research). The main features of the proposed scheme will be: (1) innovation funding in schools (one million young innovators); (2) summer camp with science icons (for high performers); (3) assured opportunity schemes for proven talent force; and (4) retention of talent in public funded research through public-private partnerships. In addition, another new scheme on Scholarships for Science in Higher Education will be initiated in the Eleventh Plan. The scheme targets institution of 10,000 fellowships of Rs. 1,00,000/- per year for bright students in science streams during their B.Sc/M.Sc courses. These initiatives are aimed at generating interest in young scientists to conduct more and more research and produce valuable results including research papers.